



EVENT SUMMARY FOR THE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES SYMPOSIUM

Alternative Futures Symposium
25 – 28 October 2011

Introduction

The Alternative Futures Symposium (AFS) was the first in a series of events that will comprise Unified Quest 2012. Unified Quest (UQ) is the Army Chief of Staff's annual Title 10 Future Study Plan (FSP) designed to examine issues critical to current and future force development. It is the Army's primary mechanism for exploring enduring strategic and operational challenges and operations in the future environment. The annual study integrates issues and insights into concepts and capability development programs through seminars, workshops, symposia, and wargames. Outcomes inform the Army, the Training and Doctrine Command, and Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC) campaign plans, the Army Strategic Planning Guidance, and CSA initiatives. In addition, the FSP develops regular input to Army Warfighting Challenges.



Background and Purpose

The AFS served as an intellectual touchstone for the Army. It was the foundational event for the Campaign of Learning, and it will drive change in the Army by challenging assumptions about the future on which leaders base strategic planning and decisions. The Alternative Futures Symposium provided the Army the opportunity to think broadly and develop multiple, plausible strategic landscapes out to 2028, through waypoints in 2015 and 2020, using key indicators that might shape the direction of the future.

Description of the Event

The Future Warfare Division of ARCIC conducted AFS 25-28 October 2011 at the Marriot Westfield Conference Center in Chantilly, VA. The event was comprised of 96 participants from five think tanks, seven defense organizations representing a wide range of expertise, six universities, and 14 countries. The participants were organized into four multidisciplinary working groups comprised of academics, U.S. and foreign military, U.S. government civilians. Each working group evaluated trends to create a view of the future strategic landscape and assessed the potential risks and opportunities to U.S. national interests in this future.



Event Outcome

Each of the four working groups developed an alternative future by extrapolating trends, and postulating reactions and decisions along a path from today to 2028. Not surprisingly, in each of the alternatives, the near futures were dominated by global economic malaise and popular uprising in autocratic states. Although these futures varied greatly in 2028, none foretold a significant recovery of the U.S. and global economies before 2020. They all postulated some degree of retrenchment in foreign and international trade policies. Even the most optimistic projection included a sharp reduction in defense spending and a US foreign policy bias toward non-intervention.

Each of the working groups identified economic challenges out through 2020; however, two of the groups saw an improved U.S. economic picture after 2020. All groups postulated some degree of retrenchment in foreign policy through 2020. Three of the four groups saw increased conflict and new alliances form over competition for limited resources of energy, water, and rare earth minerals, and three of the groups projected popular political uprisings occurring at an accelerated pace – spurred on by increased access to social media. The groups were divided on the outcome of the “Arab Spring.” These revolutions could result in new Arab democracies bringing stability, or they could usher in new dictatorships or theocracies and with them instability. All groups projected an increase in cyber attacks from state and non-state actors with significant impact on our infrastructure and society.

Key characteristics one or more of groups postulated within their futures have implications for the military and, specifically, for the Army. The trend toward populations concentrating in mega-cities (populations of greater than ten million), combined with impoverished, globally-connected populations, may drive demand for short-notice humanitarian assistance on a large scale. Technology-enabled adversaries operating in these same environments could drive demand for large-scale, cyber-supported urban operations. Social networking and stress on global financial systems could result in the sudden collapse of struggling regimes and their security forces. Conflict prevention efforts with new partners could prove crucial, as could a rapid intervention capability to prevent escalation of a conflict or regain control of weapons of mass destruction. A bias against intervention could result in delayed decisions, thereby hampering the ability to project forces from the United States. Force projection increases the importance of shaping activities to gain and maintain operational access to staging bases and to develop non-traditional allies. Finally, sudden changes of regimes, driven by political and economic turmoil, could undermine existing deterrence mechanisms, driving demand for a wider range of response options to including cyber operations.

Way Ahead

The outcomes of the AFS will shape the issues for consideration in Unified Quest 2012 “What the Army Must Do” seminar in December 2011. They will also inform the development of the *Operational Environment* to be published by the TRADOC G2 in December 2011. The outcomes will shape issues for consideration in the “How the Army Fights” seminar in January 2012, and the Building Partner Capacity seminar in February 2012. They will support revisions to the Army Capstone Concept and refinement of learning demands associated with the Army Warfighting Challenges.

In March 2012, the Future Warfare Division will publish a paper entitled “A Vision of 2028” which will influence revisions to the Army Concept Framework based in part on the outcomes of the AFS.